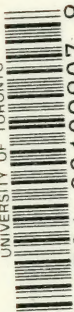


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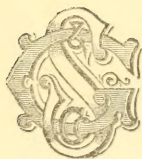




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# TO THE STUDENTS

C. F. ANDREWS



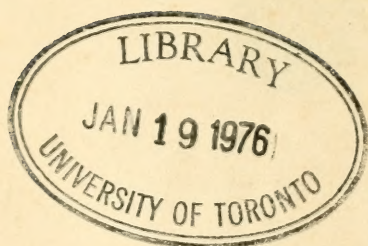
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## PREFACE

I take this opportunity to speak to the students, in the simplest way, as their friend, about things which seem to me to be of great importance. I must, however, make one point as clear as possible, before I begin; and that is, that I am in no sense whatever a leader, nor do I wish for one moment to be a leader. I wish simply to be regarded as an elder brother and friend, who has spent all his life among students and among poor people, and has studied 'student problems' and 'labour problems' more than any others. This implies that I shall write, in the only way that I can write,—merely, as a fellow-student who may often make mistakes. What I write may be either accepted or refused, without any injury to the real leadership which is in other's hands; for, as I have said again and again, I am not a politician, who deals with methods, but a thinker, who deals with ideas. I am sure to go wrong, if I suggest methods; but I hope and trust and pray to God to give me right guidance, when I deal with ideas and principles.

C. F. A.







C. F. ANDREWS AT SHANTINEKETAN



# TO THE STUDENTS

## I

### SHANTINIKETAN\*

I have chosen for my subject Shantiniketan Ashram, the one spot which has been the dearest home on earth to me for many years, the "Home of Peace", as its name denotes.

If I were to make a full confession to you at this present moment, here in Central Africa, and were to tell you what is in my inmost heart, you would find, hidden deep down there, an inextinguishable longing to be away from the tumult and the strife of tongues, in which, for months past, my life seems to have become involved,—whether in the Punjab, or in Africa,—and to be back again once more,

\*An address given in Central Africa.

himself, "This is my place of rest, the end of my pilgrimage." And he remained there year after year. He gave to the spot its present name, Shantiniketan, the Home of Peace.

Another story runs, how the captain of a robber-band came to the place, thinking that some *sadhu* had secretly buried there a hidden treasure; and when he saw the peace and heavenly radiance of the Maharshi's face, he fell at his feet and asked forgiveness and became the Maharshi's disciple.

Such stories give their own inner meaning. They make known to us the fact, that resting-places of the saints of God are hallowed by the presence of immortal joy. As the Upanishads have said: "God manifests Himself in immortal forms of joy,"—that joy which is Love's ultimate expression.

If I were to describe to you one day in the Ashram with the boys, that would perhaps best bring home to you its inner beauty. Long before sunrise, like the birds in our own Amloki groves, our boys are awake. The choristers are the first to rise, and they go round the Ashram, singing their morning hymn.

You can hear the voices in the distance, drawing nearer and nearer; and then the sound dies away, as the choir passes on to another part of the Ashram, and then again it comes nearer and nearer. The beauty of the sound in the silent morning air, and the sense of joy and reverence which it brings, give peace to the soul.

After an interval, each boy takes his *asan*,—his square of carpet,—into the fields and sits down on it to meditate in his own place alone. Later on, before the school work begins, the boys all stand together in the shade of the trees and sing their hymn to God.

Till about half past ten, the work of the school goes on. We have no class rooms. The boys sit with their teachers, in the open air, under the trees. There are no large classes. A group of eight or ten boys will be seated round the teacher asking him questions. Very few books are used. Like the education, which Plato loved in Athens, the greater part is carried on through conversation. The boys soon learn to open out all their difficulties to their teachers; and the teachers get keenly

interested in the boys' questions and answers. Such living education can never be dull.

When the morning work is over, the boys bathe and go to their meal. About two o'clock in the afternoon the school classes begin again; but at this time the work is chiefly with the hand as well as with the mind. Handiwork is practised, and a boy's own natural tastes are very soon discovered. Some prefer carpentering; others prefer mechanical work; others enjoy spinning and weaving; others become skilled draftsmen or painters; others are musicians.

There is very little book-work in the afternoon.

School is over at about four o'clock, and then there is a rush to get first into the great open fields for football. Our Shantiniketan boys are famous everywhere for their sports and games.

In the evening, at sunset, they return from the fields and sit down once more, for a short time, to meditate in silence.

As night comes on, fairy stories are told; short dramas are recited; our Gurudeva's songs

are sung; and the different school gatherings are held.

By nine o'clock, all are glad to retire to rest; and again the choristers go round the Ashram singing their last evening hymn. There can be no question as to the happiness of the life of our boys. Their faces tell the story of their joy and their freedom. There is no freer life in India than the life of our children at Shantiniketan.

"Pita nosi"—"Thou art our father", "Pita no bodhi"—"Teach us to know Thee as our father": the Poet usually takes this daily prayer, which the boys have learnt to recite, and in the simplest way of universal child-like faith, leads the hearts and minds of his children forward into the Love of God.

To the aged father of the Poet, the Maharshi, Shantiniketan Ashram was the most sacred spot on earth, not merely because of its outward beauty, but because in that place he had found God. It was the end of his long pilgrimage, the goal of his search for the Life Immortal. Over the seat of meditation, where he used to sit in worship, his favourite text is

written. The exact words are difficult to translate; for by their very sound, in Bengali, they express their inner beauty, and this cannot be given in a foreign language. The words are concerning God Himself:—

“He is the repose of my life,  
He is the joy of my heart,  
He is the peace of my soul.”

Thus the Maharshi sought for God and found Him. And we, who are not saints at all but ordinary people,—we too have been able to find God’s presence in our Ashram. The same search, the same longing for God has become more and more easy for us, owing to the prayers and blessings of those saintly lives, which have been lived and are still being lived around us.

Who can explain the children’s love for their Gurudeva, their Poet, their Teacher! It is a well-known sight, to see them running up to him, the moment he appears from his room and comes among them. Equally wonderful is it, to see him taking the little boys, in his Bengali and English classes, or singing to them some song which has been recently com-



posed. The children are his inspiration. They are also his audience and his critics. That is why his greatest songs are ever young.

Can you wonder, then, that I long to get back to Shantiniketan Ashram? Can you not understand something of its attraction for me, amid the turmoil of the money-making world and the strife of political parties?

The poet's health has been very far from strong of late, and we have all had our anxieties about him. But we know, (for he has taught us) that the true life is not touched by death at all; that the change we call Death, is not a terror, but a joy, a freedom, a deliverance. Though we have our natural, human daily cares, both about the health of our own Gurudeva, and about the future of the Ashram, though we often do not know, how we shall be able to carry on, with our scanty funds, from year to year, with prices rising higher and higher, yet we never allow these anxieties and cares of the world to overcome the inner joy in our hearts, about which I have spoken.

“God manifests Himself in immortal forms of Joy.” We have had that joy given to us, and nothing can take it away. For it is the immortal joy of God himself,—

He is the repose of our life,  
He is the joy of our hearts,  
He is the peace of our soul,  
Om, Shanti, Shanti, Shanti, Om.

## II

### DUTY TO MOTHERLAND\*

There is one subject that appears to me to stand out entirely by itself amongst students in India today for its importance and interest. Hardly a single week passes, without the eager question being put to me by some young students, "How can I serve my Motherland?" It is clear then that this should be the subject of my address to the students. For an answer, I shall have to take you far afield into the study of history. You are students. You will not, therefore, shrink from the task of an historical enquiry. I can promise you, that it shall not be unfruitful.

We have had the political answer often given of late to our question, and many have

\*Address to Behar Students at Daltongang.

devoted their lives to politics in the service of their Motherland. Many too have devoted their lives to social service in the same cause and have done most noble work. But, if I may at once confess to you without any reserve the one fact which I have found out in my own life, it is this. Practical experience has shown me, that neither of these two answers goes deep enough, or far enough, to bring me that inner peace, which gives assurance of the Truth and in which alone the heart of man can ultimately rest.

I used to engage ardently in politics in my youth. I joined the great Labour Movement in England and worked with its leaders. I entered also enthusiastically upon a course of social service and was Secretary for many years of the Cambridge University Christian Social Union. Both these paths were trodden in my younger days, and I had many friends among my fellow-workers, who shared my own enthusiasm. But the doubt always haunted me: "Is this the Ultimate Truth, which I am seeking? Or is it only some form of Expediency after all?"

More and more, I have grown older in that hardly-brought wisdom, which only comes after heart-breaking failure and unsuccessful attempt, and I have learnt the lesson, that the political motive and the social motive, however generously and patriotically held, when separated from the highest motive of all,—the search for the Infinite Truth,—are vanity and vexation of spirit. They are not sufficient, in themselves, to bring about a real national regeneration. The wheel comes round a full circle and swings backward. It constantly sweeps away any temporary success in a great reaction.

This brings me to the idea of progress. Is it an invariable sequence, that each political or social revolution leads forward? May not these movements often lead backward? Is there not such a thing as retrogression? Our modern conception of history seems to involve that we have only to extend political rights and to ameliorate social conditions, and then progress is assured. But the story of mankind, when fully studied, lends itself to no such facile interpretations. We have the actual,

historical records of vast civilisations of by-gone days, which became retrograde and vanished. There are ruins of civilisations in Africa and America with nothing but savage life around them. We have records of dead civilisations.

To take instances, the Egyptian dynasties passed away almost entirely into oblivion. Archaeologists are only deciphering today the hieroglyphics which tell of their magnificence. The Babylonian Empire was no less imposing than that of Egypt. Its engineering devices, for irrigating and cultivating the plains, were marvels of scientific skill. Yet for more than 2,500 years, Babylon has been a heap of ruins, and its wonderful scientific irrigation has been utterly destroyed. The Roman civilisation went further in law-giving and political franchise than either Babylon or Egypt. Rome gave full citizenship in the course of time to all its different races. It gave also the privileges of an equal franchise and a common equal law. Yet the Roman Empire declined and fell, when the time came, in spite of its gift of political and social rights and its equality of legal privilege.



Many of the sanest thinkers in Europe and many of her most eminent writers are asking the question openly, in the light of recent events and in the face of all the destruction wrought by the Great War, whether the decline and fall of the new Empire of the West has not already begun.

I have stated all these facts ; and now I want to take you away from them to one extraordinary phenomenon, which stands out all the more clearly by contrast. In India, as far as we are able to judge by our present historical records, a noble civilisation began at least 3,500 years ago ; and if we were to raise the limit by another thousand years, there would be much that might be said in favour of this earlier date.

This civilisation, in spite of continual lapses and long periods of outward desolation, still survives. Before Greece and Rome were heard of in history, the *Vedas* and *Upanishads* had been composed, and the unique culture which they imply had flourished. To take one other date, the great Buddhist Movement, which was to transform all Asia,

had its origin and early growth before the age of Pericles at Athens.

It is no empty phrase, therefore, to call India the "Mother among the civilisations of the world." She gave with both her hands to China and the Far East out of her own spiritual wealth. She also implanted seeds of thought, of philosophy and religion, in the soil of Persia and Greece. I am not now, however, wishing to dwell upon this past greatness of intellectual thought, but rather to point out the immense antiquity of Indian civilisation and its survival in all its essential qualities down to the present day.

My real point is this,—let me make it quite clear. Egypt has perished. Babylon has perished. But India, which was their contemporary, has not perished. She is still producing men of genius in religion, philosophy and art. This vast antiquity and perpetual youth of India is a phenomenon almost unique in the history of mankind. There is only one other fact, as far as I am aware, that can be compared with it, and that is the history of China. And

Chinese civilisation, as I have already said, owed its greatest religious debt to India.

To state the point once more in other words : Mexico, Peru, Babylonia, Egypt, all these have perished. European civilisation has not yet got through its own youthful centuries of growth, and yet it is already showing signs of decay. But India is still bringing forth fruit in her old age.

What is the reason for this ? What is the secret ? How do India and China differ from the West ? Why have they renewed their youth so often in the long course of their history ?

The more we think out the problem, the less shall we be satisfied with any merely political explanation. It has certainly not been India's political structure that has saved her from extinction. Again, when we come to her social institutions, the answer is no less clear. For while the caste system has had its uses and conveniences in the far distant past, India's greatest thinkers have almost universally acknowledged, that in later times caste has been an actual dead-weight upon progress.

What then is the salt, without which Indian civilisation would long ago have lost its savour? I find it in one thing, namely, the deep religious spirit which penetrated from the first the domestic life and made it pure and healthy,—that deep religious spirit, which made countless Indian thinkers and saints ready to sacrifice all that earth holds dear, if only they could attain to the Truth. After long and earnest meditation and enquiry, the one conclusion which I am able to draw more certainly than any other is this, that in India the religious motive, which lies deepest of all and at the back of all, as the very source and fount of inspiration, has been always vitally active. This has been the salt of purification, which has again and again renewed India and saved Indian civilisation from decay. And what I have written about India, has been true also of China in a lesser degree.

The idea of *Dharma*, of religious duty, has become a second nature in the East. No Indian or Chinese can ever throw off lightly his religious duty to his family. However distant any relative in any family may be, the

religious duty is sure to be recognised, and as a consequence the humiliations of the work-house have been practically unknown in these countries.

It is this religious ideal, also, which has made India and China humane in the matter of war and conquest. Their selfish and aggressive instincts, disciplined and restrained by religious duty, have become tamed and subdued to a far greater extent than in the West. India and China may be over-run for a time by bellicose and barbarous nations, but all the while, their inner vitality has remained and their religious outlook upon life has not been finally shattered.

When I was in Japan, some years ago, the Japanese newspapers warned the students in the different Universities of Tokyo not to listen to the words of the Indian Poet, Rabin-dra Nath Tagore, because he was the poet of a defeated nation. It was a cruel taunt, unworthy of a high-souled people, such as the Japanese. And it was untrue.

For, when this taunt is put to the test of history, its shallowness becomes at once appa-

rent. Indeed, the most unscientific test of all, in the light of history, is this mere material test of power,—as though wealth were all important ! When great civilisations are judged, not by a few years or a few centuries, but by millenniums, then this test of material power utterly breaks down.

Japan, today, may be undefeated in an outward sense, but if she loses her soul in the process, her inward defeat will be more terrible than anything which outward loss could have effected.

No ! The more closely we study history, the more clearly we find, that other terms have to be used for the rise and fall of nations than those which can be summed up in mere material gains and losses, or in territorial expansions and contractions.

Let me give one more striking example in order fully to explain my meaning. When the immensely powerful Roman Empire was at its height and had crushed all external opposition, a small nation, called the Jews, had lately been reduced in outward appearance to complete subjection. This had not been the



first of its outward defeats. It had been crushed by every imperial power in turn,—the Egyptian, the Babylonian, the Assyrian, the Greek, the Roman. Yet, at the very time when this last Roman subjection had reached its uttermost point, a poor simple village maiden named Mary could sing:—

“My soul doth magnify the Lord,  
And my spirit hath rejoiced in God, my Saviour,  
For He hath regarded

The lowliness of His handmaiden.

For behold, from henceforth  
All generations shall call me blessed.

For He that is mighty, hath magnified me,  
And Holy is His name,

And His mercy is on them that fear Him,  
Throughout all generations.

He hath showed strength with His arm,  
He hath scattered the proud, in the imagination of  
their hearts,

He hath put down the mighty from their seats,  
And hath exalted the humble and meek.

He hath filled the hungry with good things,  
And the rich He hath sent empty away.”

Since the day on which Mary sang that song, the rich and mighty Roman Empire has

passed into the dust. God has "scattered the proud in the imagination of their hearts." He has "exalted the humble and meek." For out of the religious heart of that Jewish people, Jesus the son of Mary was born, who brought to his own race no direct political advancement of power and glory, but by deep meditation upon the Truth, in the workshop, in the solitude of the hill-tops and in desert places, planted at last seed-thoughts of religion so freshly and so deeply in the heart of mankind, that they have been germinating ever since, and springing up into new life, and bearing precious fruit throughout the whole world.

It will be noticed, at once, that we have here, according to the standard of the Japanese newspapers a 'defeated' nation. But how shallow such a verdict would be, if uttered by responsible historians! What is far more noticeable is the fact that here, in the Jews of Asia, we have yet again another people of Asia, whose true genius has been ever set towards religion. The reason why the Jews have never been finally defeated, although they have been scattered over the face of the earth, has been

the same as that of India. Their deeply implanted religious instinct has preserved them. This has been the salt of their national life that has kept them from extinction.

The more I have thought over this historical problem of Asia, the cradle of all the earliest civilisations and the birth-place of all noble religions, the more convincingly the conclusion has come home to me that it is because her peoples as a whole are fundamentally religious, that they have survived while others have perished. It is no accident which has brought about the well-known historical fact, that the founders of all the great religions of the world were born without any exception in Asia.

If, however, the time should come when the peoples of Asia, hypnotised by the material power of the West, should abandon their own God-given function of creative life in religion, then I cannot tell you how great would be the fall, not only for Asia itself, but for the whole world.

With these thoughts, therefore, always present in my mind, you will understand what

value I place upon this distinctive gift of Asia to the human race. You will realise, why I cannot talk to you, either about the political situation, or about changes in the social structure, without at once connecting these things intimately with religion.

That this has been no new question with me may be seen from the following letter which I wrote to a friend in India while I was in South Africa during the Passive Resistance Movement in the year 1914:

“Here in South Africa,” I wrote, “I see more and more the hopelessness of this political struggle—noble as it is—if it stands alone. It does not cut at the very root of the evil. In so far as Passive Resistance has been spiritual in quality, it has left its mark. But the political aspect, which at present appears to be so prominent, seems only to have accentuated the race cleavage. And it has told upon the character of the Indians themselves making them restless and impatient instead of calm and enduring.

“The noblest gain has been the growth of manly independence. That has been all to

the good, and the supreme courage of the Indians has extorted an unwilling admiration even from opponents.

“But a far deeper work is needed if the gain which has been already achieved is not to sink back again into loss. And this work can only be accomplished when the inner chamber of the heart is prepared in silence, and from out of that silence the word of Truth at last is spoken, before which all men must bow in reverence.”

It is this ultimate word of Truth, which year after year in the West and the East, throughout my whole life, I have ever been seeking; and often, through my own mistakes and shortcomings, I have failed to find it. Yet after every failure I have become all the more certain, that it will be found at last, and that I shall find it in India and through India. For I have profound faith, based on experience, that India in our present generation has a spiritual message of supreme value to give to mankind.

But there is a materialism today which has infected the very air we breathe. I have

felt its oppression weighing heavily upon my own spirit every time I have come back from the country districts of India to reside in the towns. The atmosphere of our modern Indian cities has become saturated with materialism and it is difficult for any individual to raise his head above the mist and to avoid the stifling fumes.

Thank God, the country districts are not as yet so insidiously affected as the towns.

I do not think that, in order to avoid materialism in life and conduct, it is necessary to remain strictly orthodox and to keep up all religious observances of the past, though no one should lightly reject them or despise them. Religion does not mean the same as orthodoxy. In its essence, Religion is as simple and pure as the sunlight which gladdens the heart. For Religion means, above all, faith,—faith in God, faith in Truth, faith in Immortality, faith in the higher life, faith in mankind, which shows itself in deeds of love. With such faith in our hearts we can never wholly sink down into the mire of money-worship.



Asia has always had faith in spiritual ideals. She has always placed the true value of life in things divine, not in material possessions. It is because I have found this faith in the higher life so vitally present in her, that India has truly become my second home, dearer to me than Europe, with all her material splendour. It is because of this faith in spiritual ideals, that Indians have become 'to me the truest friends I have ever had, or could ever wish to have, dearer than brothers to me', dearer than life itself.

I have been speaking to you about familiar things, with a new emphasis and a new urgency of meaning, and you have listened patiently to me. My one object has been to seek to increase the hold which religion has upon your lives. For Religion is the one foundation of all true political action, of all true social service, of all true national regeneration.

And now if you ask again the question: How can I serve my Motherland? I can only tell you : Seek and you shall find ; ask and you shall receive ; knock and it shall be opened to you. The way can only be found by patient,



earnest search, by uncompromising following  
of ideals, by strict adherence to the Truth.

My own answer I have found, after very many years of anxious search, in Shantiniketan, the Abode of Peace. There I have listened, in silence, for the ultimate word of Truth. As the poet sings of her :

“ The stillness of her shades is stirred by the  
woodland whisper,  
Her *amlaki* groves are a quiver with the rapture  
of leaves  
She dwells in us and around us, however far  
we may wander.  
She weaves our hearts in a song, making us  
one in music.”

In the silence of her skies and in the peace of her groves and in the companionship of boys and teachers, I have found a nearer vision of the Truth than in the busy money-making world. And what I have been trying to do all this while, in speaking to you from my heart, is to help you, each one of you, if I can, to seek and find your Shantiniketan your own abode of peace, where you too can

hear in the silence the Ultimate word of Truth.

I can wish for you no better boon on earth than this, and I can desire for you no better way to serve your Motherland.

### III

## NATIONAL EDUCATION\*

I wish to come before you as a fellow student, not as a teacher and preceptor. I desire to find out, with your help, something of what national education in India really implies.

More and more, thoughtful men and women in India have become aware that the system of Government and Government-aided schools and colleges, which has held the field for more than fifty years, has failed,—grievously, lamentably failed.

I have had my own bitter experience, within that system, as a learner and a teacher. For a long time, I tried to write and to speak all I could in favour of that system, and as a

\* I have revised this speech delivered at the Bombay Students' Convention and corrected certain one sided expressions before final publication in book form.

believer in that system ; for I started with a strong belief in its efficacy. But little by little, I came to understand that, while it did much, in certain directions, to unify India and set free the mind from superstition, yet politically it led to a new form of dependence upon the foreign ruling power and also to the growth of foreign, not of indigenous, culture. Little by little, I came to realise, how deadening that atmosphere of political subservience was to the soul. I saw students, with bright intelligent faces, becoming more and more lifeless and inert, appearing more and more lacking in initiative and self-reliance.

It is, indeed, a shame to me to have to confess to you that, among the hundreds of pupils who have come under my care in the ten years that I was working in Delhi, there are very few indeed today who have fully learnt the qualities which make education a living power to transform character and which send men out on high adventurous quests. Very few have acted out in their lives the things that they were taught from their books. Very few, alas ! as far as I can gather, have not

sunk back into routine work with little initiative behind it.

Let me give one instance, out of a thousand, to show in what political bondage we have been held in India. When Lala Lajpat Rai was suddenly deported, in the year 1907, under an entirely defunct ordinance of 1818, I expressed very strongly indeed to my own senior students in St. Stephen's College, Delhi, what indignation I felt at such high-handed acts. This conduct of mine was reported in the newspapers, and great exception was taken to it by the Punjab Government. On Lala Lajpat Rai's release, in November of the same year, I heartily encouraged the students' own desire to illuminate the College, and we had a brilliant festival of lamps. For acting in this manner, I was definitely told that the Government seriously contemplated withdrawing their grant from the College. The warning was given to me, again and again, that such things were impossible in India. I replied, "How on earth, then, can the students live? How on earth can the students breathe?" The reply to these questions was

as definitely as possible officially declared in the notorious Risley Circular, which insisted that teachers should not be permitted to discuss current politics with their own pupils. In what I have just said, and am about to say, I do not wish to imply that Government aided Colleges are an unmixed evil. There is much that is noble in them and much that is good. But the *political* subjection and the craving after Government Service, as the one end of all education, remain unbroken in their monotonously enervating effect.

I remember how, one year, there was a strike at M. A. O. College, at Aligarh, on account of the conduct of some of the European professors. The whole College was in a state of suppressed mutiny and revolt. One morning, two of the noblest friends I have ever had in my life,—Maulvi Nazir Ahmed and Munshi Zakaullah,—came to me and asked me, with tears in their eyes, to go down with them to Aligarh in order to help to save the M. A. O. College from utter disaster. I went down with them. Soon after my arrival, a College meeting was held. One of the English

Professors implored me to stay in his own bungalow, while he was away at the meeting. I could not quite understand his meaning, but while I was seated reading a copy of the "Punch" in an arm chair, I heard the tramp of armed men and found that about fifty military police, armed with rifles and bayonets, had surrounded the bungalow. This English Professor had called them in, because he had been in fear, that his house would be attacked in his absence by his own students! Could there possibly be a more demoralising situation for a teacher than that? It was equivalent in my own mind to a disbelief in the very education which was being imparted. In the days of Mr. Beck, there had been a truly noble atmosphere of sympathy and mutual trust, and a growth of spiritual and intellectual freedom in the students' minds, but the state of things that I saw on that day was intolerable.

When we were departing to Delhi, I asked the Maulvi Sahib what advice he had been able to give to the students, who had been so incensed that they had burnt all their furniture and books. He had said to me,—'I told



them that they were not free men, but slaves. If they were free men, they might act as free men ; but now, as things were, the only thing was for them to go back into their slavery." I said " Maulvi Sahib, that is terrible advice." He said bitterly,—“ Yes, but it is true.”

In after years, I came to know how much truer than I supposed at the time, the advice of the Maulvi Sahib was. I came to discover in my own mind the seeds of political acquiescence and laissez faire beginning to grow up. With all my might, I tried to tear them out by the roots. I tried to speak and to act as a free man. But all this only drove me more and more, every day, out of the Government system of education.

I will give one more example in order to show what I mean by the political subjection from which education has suffered in India, and is still suffering. The Vice-Chancellor of the Punjab University particularly wished for my help on the University Syndicate for the preparation of Honours courses. But I had not yet been nominated as a Fellow. He sent my name up more than once, but for

political reasons, the Lieutenant Governor, who was also the Chancellor, refused to nominate me at the request of the Vice-Chancellor. He prostituted his educational position, as Chancellor, in order to effect a political object. This degradation of education has gone on throughout the length and breadth of India, and as long as Government grants are taken it will continue.

At last after many struggles in my own mind and many breakings of ties of old friendship and associations, I determined to be free. I felt that true education could only proceed in an atmosphere of pure and joyous freedom, which would give creative energy to the mind and spirit. I came to Bolpur, and I have been at Shantiniketan, for nearly seven years, unrestricted by any Government restraints and unhampered by Government doles and grants. The only nuisance, which I cannot get rid of, is the ubiquitous and perpetual espionage of the C. I. D. ! I have found these light fingered gentry prying into my private correspondence when at Delhi ; I have found them even suborning and bribing our own students to spy

upon me and upon their fellow undergraduates.

Even the peace of Shantiniketan is sometimes disturbed by their presence. And when I go abroad, I am still often shadowed like a common thief or pickpocket. But this price is small and insignificant to pay in return for the precious heritage of freedom itself, which I have found at Bolpur, in such an overflowing measure.

I cannot tell you, therefore, with what joy I have welcomed the new National movement on its constructive side, when it came boldly up to these Colleges in bondage and said to them "Be free!", I am not a politician, and I have never taken active part in any National Congress, but, as an ardent educationist, I can wish "God speed" with all my heart to this new constructive enthusiasm which is already raising up new schools and colleges, making them self-dependent, self-governing and entirely free from all government control. "God speed" be with every such endeavour! Such is my heart-felt prayer.

I turn to one further aspect of national education in India. It is on this and this

alone, that I shall have time to dwell now. For I can only touch one other side of a many sided subject. The true education of ancient India, in the time of her highest aspirations, was not given amid the paraphernalia of great ugly buildings and cumbersome furniture, costing fabulous sums of money, but in the natural school rooms of the forest ashrams underneath the shady trees and in thatched mud cottages. Outwardly, there was every sign of poverty. But inwardly, there were reached, in those very forest schools, some of the highest flights of human thought to which mankind has ever attained. The ideal of the Brahmachari Ashram, the ideal of the forest hermitage, is not a dead ideal of the past. It is the very secret, so I fervently believe, of India's true national greatness in education. It is the secret which must be learnt afresh in the days of freedom which are now dawning.

We must revive this ideal of simplicity which has been snatched away from us. The West has brought in its place a vulgar ideal,—the ideal of bigness, the ideal of power. That is not the ancient ideal, either of India,

or China, or Japan. Believe me,—I speak as a convert in this, who has been converted from this false religion of material Europe, this worship of bigness and power. Believe me, Europe herself and America, also, will each in turn have to bow their heads and become humble as little children, if they desire to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven of Learning in all its beauty and truth.

If you have followed the course of history, if you have traced the beginnings of each and all of those religious movements, which have left their mark upon Indian history, one by one, in turn, you will find this striking fact. It was in the ages of deepest poverty and sacrifice and renunciation, that the torch of learning burnt brightest through the night of human darkness.

It was in the pure simple renunciation of the forest life, that the eternal truths of the Upanishads were given to mankind. Later on, it was in those Buddhist monasteries of Nalanda and Thakshasila and countless other places, that the priceless ethical wisdom of ancient India was lived and studied and taught.

If we come later down the stream of history to Islam, we find again the same thing. What period in Islam is more glorious, in its living truth, than the days of the Prophet himself and of Abu Bakr, and the earliest Musalman believers, when they were living as one brotherhood of love amid the barest outward poverty of the Arabian desert?

Again,—to turn for one moment to the West,—the Dark Ages of Europe themselves were illuminated by the learned saintly monks of the Benedictine and Cistercian Orders, who worked and studied and prayed, in utter poverty and renunciation. And this same truth was made manifest in the Franciscan Movement. St. Francis of Assisi took Poverty as his Bride, following the example of Jesus of Nazareth, who was the poorest of the poor and had not where to lay his head. Out of this movement of religious poverty sprang one of the greatest revivals of learning that the world has ever seen. I myself owe all the Education I have received to a Franciscan College, at Cambridge, whose first walls were made of mud and wattle, and



whose first teachers were twelve disciples of Francis of Assisi, the Saint who followed Christ in the spirit of utter poverty.

The lesson is true to-day,—true in the very midst of “big business,” mammoth industries, millionaire capitalism, which flaunt themselves unashamedly side by side with sweated misery and vice and crime,—the lesson is true to-day that in simplicity alone, can national education, in India, be truly founded. The Brahmachari Ashram, in its ideal of poverty and renunciation, must be restored if our learning to-day in India is to be worthy of the source from whence it sprang.

These then are some of the lessons, I have been learning, as a student, at Shantiniketan. These are things, that I have been finding out through my own personal experience. It is these lessons of pure freedom, pure simplicity, pure renunciation, which I long, with all of you, my fellow-students, to see once more restored to the Motherland.

Bande Mataram !



## IV

### INDEPENDENCE\*

Today is the anniversary of the death of Maharshi and you will forgive me if my words on such a sacred occasion have a solemn tone. In Shantiniketan, we shall be having to-day a religious service, at which I shall not be able to be present, but my thoughts are in the Ashram all the while. The eldest son of Maharshi, Dwijendra Nath Tagore, is there at Shantiniketan, and I cannot tell you with what joy he has witnessed the enthusiasm for independence which the Calcutta university students have shown. My dearest English friend, Mr. W. W. Pearson, whose love for the students of Bengal is the deepest thing in all his life, is with us in our Ashram to-day in spirit. He sent to Mahatma Gandhi this message,—“I am coming back to India with the Poet in the autumn

\* Speech delivered to a mass meeting of students in Mirzapur Park, Calcutta.

and I trust that, when I reach the shores of India, I shall find India free." And there is one more, whose name I have kept to the last, whom I love to call my Gurudev, Rabin-dranath Tagore. My reverence for him is too deep for words, so that I cannot speak of him in public; but his memory is very deep in my heart to-day. I have felt the presence of all these influences, the living and the dead, and I cannot talk to you at such a time merely of current politics. I must speak to you of Dharma, of religion, of the life of the spirit, not of the things of the material world. I know that you will listen to me with patience and attention.

First of all, I want to tell you that independence, complete and perfect independence, for India, is a religious principle with me. It is the proclamation of the Soul in man as it declares its own Divinity. Who would dare to say to the Atma which is one with the Paramatma that it must remain in subjection? The Hindu Shastras declare that the Atma in man is divine. The Muhammedan scriptures declare that God is nearer to man than his

jugular vein. The Christian scriptures have declared that the Word, within the heart, which enlightens every man, is the very Word of God himself. Will any Empire dare to hold in subjection those who are made in the image of God? Will any group of people, who are mere men, keep God in bondage? No, no. Every scripture of the human race preaches the same burning word of freedom, which ushered in the French Revolution, when it proclaimed, that God had made men by nature free, but man had bound himself with chains.

When the call of independence comes to the human soul, it is a divine call, and I believe that this divine call has come to India to-day. And you, who are young, who are the heirs of the future, have heard it. Let it not excite any passion of vengeance or hatred. Let it be recognised as the voice of God, who is the God and Father of us all, of Indians and Chinese, of Arabs and Turks, of Englishmen, of Frenchmen, of Germans, of Americans and Africans and Australians—the God and father of us all.

And in the second place, independence—complete and perfect independence for India, is a religious principle with me, because I am a Christian. My Lord and Master, Christ, has said to me, in the words which have been called the Golden Rule of life,—“Whatsoever ye wish that men should do unto you, even so do unto them: for this is the law of the prophets”.

I apply that rule to my own Indian brothers and Indian sisters, who have given me their trust. Should not I wish, that men should give to me my freedom and independence? If my country were in subjection, should not I wish it to be free and independent? Of course I should. Nothing in the whole world would compensate me for the loss of freedom. Very well, then. If that is so, if I wish men to give freedom to me, what follows? Is it not my religious duty, as a Christian, to give freedom to them? Let me repeat the Golden Rule. “Whatsoever ye wish that men should do unto you, even so do unto them, for this is the law of the prophets.”

And in the third place, I want to say quite clearly that after ten long years of painful experience, travelling over the world and seeing the British Empire in all its different parts,—in Fiji, in Australia, in New Zealand, in East and South Africa, in the Malay Peninsula, in Hong Kong, in Ceylon and in India itself, I have come at last to the conclusion that Indians cannot remain any longer in the British Empire, as it stands to-day. That Empire does not allow Indians as settlers over nearly four fifths of its land surface, outside India itself, that is to say, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand and in South Africa. In nearly every other part, it only tolerates Indians as subordinates. After over a hundred years, there is hardly a single country in the colonies and Dominions where Indians have full and equal citizen rights, together with free right of entry.

I have seen with my own eyes, on every hand, in almost every part of the world, the religion of “White Race Supremacy”, taught and practised. This arrogant creed makes it absolutely impossible for Indians to

remain in such an Imperial System with any self-respect. I believe that this religion of "White Race Supremacy" is the greatest of all curses to the human race to-day. I hate and detest this "White Race Religion." It is fundamentally opposed to my own Christian religion—the religion which Christ himself declared—the religion of the brotherhood of all men in the common Fatherhood of God.

In the fourth place, I wish to say, with deep conviction, that independence can never be won if the fifty millions of the untouchables—the depressed classes of India—remain still in a state of subjection which amounts almost to serfdom.

No one can be truly free himself, no one is worthy of freedom, who enslaves others. To take my own case, I am an Englishman; but England cannot be England to me, the England of Shakespeare and Milton, of Hampden and Cromwell, of Burke, of Shelley and Wordsworth, Clarkson and Wilberforce, of Bright and Gladstone, England cannot be England to me—the England I love,—if she keeps others in subjection in her colonies and in her empire, and if she



holds down Ireland and India and Egypt by military force and repression. And India cannot be India to you, the India of your dreams (and of my dreams also, if I may speak as one of her children) if she keeps others in subjection. That is why Mahatmaji himself has said, that India cannot win "Swaraj" in one year, or in a hundred years, if she does not give "Swaraj" to her own depressed classes, her own untouchables.

One more point and I have done. India will not be the India of my dearest religious hopes on earth, if in her great struggle for freedom she turns from the path of love and peace to follow paths of bloodshed and violence, the pathway of the sword. I have told this as clearly as possible to my friend, Maulana Shaukat Ali, and he understands me, as he understands also Mahatmaji. For it has been the dearest of all religious hopes hitherto in my own life,—it has been the one dream that has sustained me, all through these hideous years of blood-stained war and no less blood-stained peace, that India may show to Europe the true and living pic-



ture of Christ, that India may show the world in actual deeds of love, what the Sermon on the Mount really means. For Europe has, of late, lost sight of the figure of the Christ, my Master. Europe has believed in 'Himsa,' not in 'Ahimsa' at all.

There is a very wonderful poem in this month's 'Prabasi' published by one whom I revere, for his purity of soul, Satyendra Dutt. He wrote it on Christmas Day, the day of peace and good will. It has the following words : "There is no room for thee, O Christ in Europe to-day. Come O Lord, Christ ! Come to India ! Take thy stand in Asia, in the country of Buddha, of Janak, Kabir, Nanak, Nimai, Nitai, Sook and Sanak."

If this great and pure movement, which Mahatma Gandhi has started only ends in violence and bloodshed ; if his great and pure movement does not win by suffering and suffering alone, then these dearest religious hopes will have been in vain. But, I still believe, with all my heart and soul, that the people of India are gentle and humane, as no other people. I still believe, that the religious

message of the Buddha, Kabir and Nanak and a thousand others,—the message of my own Master Christ,—is still a living message in India to-day.

Keep to that pure and true independence, the independence of the soul,— the independence of the soul, that wins by suffering and by loving service. Then, there will come to mankind a new power of peace and goodwill on earth, such as no League of Nations can attain.

Bandemataram.

## V

### TO THE STUDENTS

#### THE SERIOUSNESS OF THE NEW MOVEMENT

My first impression has been one of supreme thankfulness, on account of the sober and practical nature of the Movement. The students, who have come to me, have not been of the merely excitable type. They are utterly different from the picture given in the 'Times of India' in a leaderette, which I shall venture to quote because it shows the bad qualities which were expected of us all by those who are instinctively opposed to us. But, before quoting it, I would clearly state, that the picture no more suits the earnest and sober Bombay student delegates, whom I met at the Federation Convention, than it suits the student leaders whom I have met in Calcutta. The passage in the 'Times of India' reads as follows:

"In the farrago of nonsense to which Mr. C. F. Andrews treated the Students' Federation on

Saturday, he made great play with the fact that he is an educationist and vaunted his knowledge of crowd psychology ; but neither the one, nor the other, was able to save him from the error of hailing the easily induced rowdyism of students, and their natural desire to take holidays, if given the least excuse from grown-ups, as the "breaking of the chains of servitude and the dawn of freedom." This would be simply funny, were it not that the times are serious and the issues at stake tremendous. It is amusing that Mr. Andrews, unmindful that schoolboys all the world over "creep like snails unwillingly, to school," should call days of truancy, "these new and inspiring days of freedom;" but the thing has its tragic side. It is tragic that grown up men should encourage disobedience to parents, contempt of discipline, and the "ragging" propensities of undergraduates ; it is tragic that an educationist, should belittle learning and discourage the humility that should belong to studentship ; it is tragic to see a man who professes to understand crowd psychology deliberately using the wiles of the demagogue upon a gathering of excitable young men. It is the wanton counsel of men like Mr. Andrews, who are intoxicated with their ability to rouse the passions of mobs, that is answerable for such instances of freedom as the shouting down of

Mrs. Besant by students, the invasion of Wilson College by a young student suffering from megalomania, and the acts of insubordination which are all that non-co-operation means to the irresponsible young."

I have become long ago inured to far harder words being said about me than the Editor of the "Times of India" has uttered in the above passage. The reason I have quoted it, is simply this. I want to point out at once, how utterly ludicrous it is to describe the present Movement, either here, or in Bombay, or in Aligarh, or in Behar, or elsewhere, where I have seen it, as being due to the *easily induced rowdyism of students and their natural desire to take holidays*. I have lived among the students and have shared their thoughts in a way which is impossible for the Editor of the "Times of India" to do; and I say without any hesitation, that the student leaders of the student community in every centre I have visited are the most sober and thoughtful and self-sacrificing, not the rowdy element. Among the rank and file of the Movement, also, I have

noticed a quietness and order, mingled with a healthy enthusiasm, which have moved me very much indeed. It is true, that there have been acts which were due to excessive eagerness of spirit. I have at once endeavoured to check these wherever they have been brought to my notice. But it is absurd to condemn the whole Movement for a few acts like these, which no great national uprising has ever been without.

Let these detractors of the Movement understand its serious nature. Let them also remember, that, in every modern country, which has won its liberty, the students have led the way. I have quite recently been hearing, at first hand, from one who has come from China, how the boycott of the Japanese goods, which put an end to Japanese aggression, was, from first to last, the work of College students of China. Every Englishman would praise that act in China. Why should so many Englishmen make light of these serious acts of students in India?

This, then, is my first point. It is the practical earnestness of the present

Movement, which has made it a power to be reckoned with, and not to be despised. We are living in very earnest and serious times. We are not merely engaged in having a bit of fun.

In the second place, I wish at once to sound one note of warning, from my own painful experience. I can do this best by describing an incident in Delhi, during those terrible days in April 1919. One day, at a time when we were doing our utmost to keep the people calm under great provocation, suddenly, a man came rushing down the Chandni Chowk near to the Fatepuri Masjid crying that Swami Shraddhananda had been arrested. By an accident, Indra, his son, was passing that way at the time, and he shouted out, as the crowd excitedly collected, that this man was a C. I. D. spy and that he had only a few moments ago left his father safely in his own house. He then turned to the man, and said,—“I know you! you are a spy!” The man fled at once and disappeared.

I have told this story, because I wish to put all students on their guard, from the very



first. The same C. I. D. *badmashi* is almost certain to be practised, in order to bring the present peaceful Movement into disgrace.

In the Punjab, during that terrible year, 1919, this incident in Delhi was not the only event that appeared to emanate from the spies, whom the C. I. D. so profusely employed. These men must earn their pay. They are always looking for their reward. And if they act, from time to time, as what the French call 'agents provocateurs', what is the wonder?

But students must take no notice of their excited provocations and agitations. Students must determine, every day of their lives, that no provocation, however seemingly innocent of mischief, shall induce them to do violence, or take part in any deed of violence. I have not for a moment sounded this warning in order to give rise to any fear. Quite the reverse! The best way of meeting such miserable tawdry business, is by utter fearlessness and openness,—above all, by holding the doctrine of *ahimsa* dearer to our souls than life itself. We are not Children of the Darkness

but Children of the Light. Let us act, in every way, as Children of the Light.

### THE MEANING OF NON-VIOLENCE

I wish to make as plain as I possibly can, the meaning of non-violence. We are all agreed, from first to last, that this great Movement of the soul of India for Freedom is a Movement to win by love and not by hate, by suffering not by vengeance, by non-violence not by violence.

But it is a very feeble definition of non-violence, that confines it merely to acts of brute force,—what are called acts of “physical violence”. There may be certain forms of violence far more terrible than that which is physical. The violence, for instance, of a man who sits *dharana*, in order to take a terrible revenge upon his enemy, is so awful to contemplate, that a violent physical assault with a dagger would be as nothing in comparison. Again, a single word of calumny uttered by the tongue, may stab far deeper than any stab with a knife. Christ said, in the Sermon on the Mount,—“ Ye have heard it said in olden

times 'Thou shalt not kill.' But I say unto you, that he who is angry with his brother is in danger of the judgment." He meant, that those who kill with a weapon, kill only the body, but those who stab with the tongue of anger are in danger of killing the soul.

So then, we see at once, that we must revise our definition of non-violence, if we have only thought of it hitherto as meaning the use of *physical force*.

I will take a further example, to show how absurd that limitation of the meaning is. I was engaged in tracking down all the wiles and deceptions of the *arkatis*, or recruiters, who were inveigling poor, ignorant village men and women to go out to the sugar plantations in Fiji. These men were professionals, who received fifty to sixty rupees for each recruit they could get. I soon found out, that the most unscrupulous recruiters of all relied upon a kind of hypnotism which they practised. I found one poor villager, a Jat from the Punjab, in a depot. I asked him if he wished to go out to Fiji, and he said 'Yes!' But

something in his face told me he was under the influence of fear. I turned the manager of the depot out of the room, and immediately the jat threw himself down at my feet and implored me to set him free. Then I called the manager in again, and asked a second time "Do you want to go to Fiji?" and again the poor Jat said,—"Yes!"

I turned sharply to the manager and said,—“You are hypnotising the man. Look the other way.” Then I asked a third time, and the Jat immediately said ‘No, I *don't* want to go to Fiji.’ I took him out of the recruiter's clutches, and there was no happier man in India that day, than the Jat who was thus set free.

These recruiters used no act of physical violence. All the same this mental violence was far more deadly than a blow with the fist. It was the violence of the ‘evil eye’. It was the violence of a ‘soul-force for evil.’

Just one more example, of a far more delicate nature. I found out once, long ago, that I had such an influence over a certain student that he would be willing to do any thing for me. He came to me one day and

said, If you will only say the word, I will become a Christian." There was a great temptation to me at that time to use my influence with him in that way ; but I said to myself, 'No, that is not his own free will and conviction: it is only his personal regard for me.' And for that reason I would not use my influence at all, because I felt that it would be a kind of moral violence.

But you may well ask me, how are we who are students to distinguish between what is violent and non-violent ? We can easily distinguish between a blow and not a blow ; but we can hardly distinguish between moral persuasion and moral violence, between passive resistance and passive violence.

Well, I know in my own life's experience no better rule than the Golden Rule of Life which runs as follow:—"Whatsoever you wish men to do unto you : even so do unto them." Hence, if Englishmen love freedom and independence themselves, then they ought to wish to give freedom and independence to Indians. This wish for Indian freedom is a part of my religion. And if Indians love in-

dependence themselves, they ought at once to wish to give independence to the depressed classes. So also if students wish to be free and independent themselves they must in no way interfere with the freedom and independence of those who differ from them. For, it is a very poor sort of freedom, that is built upon the compulsion of others.

So then, if this Golden Rule is applied, it will not be difficult to see that there ought not to be any compulsion used of any kind, that prevents others from doing what *their* own conscience tells them to be right. Remember, it is not only what we think to be right, that matters. They have consciences as well as we; and if they only join the movement out of fear, or out of ridicule, or out of mob compulsion, or even mob psychology, that is no worthy ground to stand on. Students of that kind can only weaken the movement. They cannot give strength. There is a great truth in the proverb, that "One volunteer is worth ten pressed men."

The ultimate test of the Movement is not that of mere numbers. When Christ entered



Jerusalem, there were thousands that followed him, shouting and rejoicing. But when he was standing up for the Truth, a few days later, these very same men were crying, 'Crucify him! Crucify him!' And when he was dying upon the cross, even his chosen followers forsook him and fled. Only his mother and one faithful disciple, named John, remained. To-day we are standing for the truth; we believe in freedom. Let us not rest upon any other foundation. Let us 'give freedom to those who differ from us. Let us rest upon truth alone.

### THE PROGRESS OF THE NEW MOVEMENT

This subject of the new Student Movement has never been absent from my thoughts and prayers : for I fully understand, in India, its supreme importance. The future rests with the students, more than with any other class of the Indian community. They sow the seeds, which will afterwards spring up and bear fruit. They hold in their hands the promise of the days to come.



I wish to take stock of what has happened and to mark out in detail the actual progress that has been made.

The first thing, that I see clearly written on the new page of Indian history to-day is this.—The old order of things, implying a complete reliance upon Government for everything, has been shaken to its very foundations. No parent, or guardian, is likely to have the same implicit faith in Government institutions and in Government posts, as they had in days gone by. We have begun in this way to win back our own freedom of initiative.

Parents have come to me at Bolpur, and in Calcutta, and have told me, that their one wish has been that their children should be independent. It has been quite remarkable to find, with what unanimity parents have determined to seek some new opening and career for their children, and not to rely upon Government any longer. I found out, on enquiry, that there was now no strong opposition on the part of the parents and guardians to the students leaving the Government-aided colleges and taking up new work. This was to me a

new fact and a new experience. It gave me the greatest hope for the future.

The question may naturally be asked,—  
“If that be so, then what was the reason for so many students returning to the Government colleges after they had once come out in response to the Nation’s call?”

The answer is probably this. The leaders, who were seeking to lead the students along new paths, did not fully meet the expectations of the students. The students were confused. They did not find in themselves sufficient inner strength to face the problem of the future single-handed.

So they went back, for the time being, to their studies, determined, sooner or later, to set themselves entirely free, but, realising their own present weakness. Personally, I should be the last to blame those, who have acted thus in all good faith. It was certainly far better to return to their studies, if they could not find their true vocation outside. I should deprecate it if they supposed that nothing had been achieved by those remarkable days, in which they struggled to

be free. Much has been accomplished. The prestige of past convention has been broken down. A silent revolution has been brought about in the minds of parents and guardians. A new movement towards Life and Liberty has been inaugurated. The failure has been on the surface merely: the gain has been very great indeed.

In the second place, while it is true that large groups of students have gone back, it is also the fact that an appreciable number have not returned at all. The spirit of these students could not endure any further delay. They have counted the cost. Their lives have now become dedicated to their country's service. One by one, they are finding their own new spheres of work. The final hope of the future is, in a great measure, in their hands; and they will not be found wanting, when the time comes, to offer their service to the full.

Some of these students have come to us at Shantiniketan. We have already found an inspiration in our midst from their serious enthusiasm and practical working capacity. I

have now had an opportunity of studying their characters at close quarters. The impression left upon me has been one of deep respect,—and, I would add, reverence,—for their high purpose, their quietness of determination, and their sincerity of ideal. They are not “boys,”—as they are so often called in the English and Indian papers. The word is a misnomer, and should be altogether dropped. They are grown-up men. They have gladly faced the suffering and wordly loss which will be required of them. They are ready to face all difficulties.

A teacher of older years and experience, who has been their leader, has told me, that he has been filled with wonder and admiration at the joyous freedom of spirit, with which they have encountered all hardships and disappointments. Perhaps it is as well that they should have met these at the very outset of their new career. Such difficulties are the necessary discipline of the spiritual life of service ; and they will overcome them, and gain inner strength by the very process.

For all these things, I feel certain that

we may offer thanks to God for the progress of the Movement.

#### THE PRACTICAL WORK DONE

I should like to relate, in corroboration of the above something about the new student work, as I have been privileged to see it with my own eyes and to watch its progress in our own neighbourhood.

In the district round Bolpur, the student movement has gone forward, from village to village, with remarkable rapidity. I have been frequently called upon to go out to some distance and speak at the meetings organised by these student workers. It is from what I have seen on these occasions that I have been chiefly drawing my experience.

The first thing that I have noticed is this. In every place and at every meeting the rich and the poor,—the zamindars and the villagers, the educated and the illiterate,—have been drawn together by the earnestness and sincerity of the workers. This student movement has become a vehicle which may be used

for the reconstruction of social life in Bengal. It has already purged away many of the harsh relations between the different orders of modern Indian society.

Another fact, which is easily noticeable, is that Hindus and Musalmans now sit down side by side as brothers. The old differences are no longer felt so acutely as in the past. The Chairmen of the meetings, which I have attended, have been sometimes Hindu and sometimes Musalman.

I have had, perhaps, more occasion than most Englishmen of knowing the difficulties of such a religious *rapprochement* in the past. For, I have lived for many years in the Punjab, where the religious bitterness and division used to be acute. I can well understand, therefore, what it means when, among the masses themselves, and not merely among the few educated leaders at the top, these differences have been overcome. This fact is entirely due to the supreme faith and courage of Mahatma Gandhi, who has risked all kinds of evil report in order to bring about such a religious settlement. In the student movement

he has found a faithful body of workers devoted to this great idea—the Hindu-Muslim unity.

Again, I have noticed that the principal subject of discussion at these village meetings has not been politics at all, but that of self-purification. The drink and drug habit which has so deeply infected the nation with its poison, and in Bengal itself has impoverished and degraded, even during the last few years, whole districts,—this subject of intemperance has been the one burning question. I can testify that it has always held these village audiences in close attention, whenever it has been taken up. There has been no violent controversial language, but rather the atmosphere of a great religious revival.

There is one more striking feature of this new movement, which the students have inaugurated. A comradeship has sprung up at these gatherings, which is of inestimable value and very beautiful to behold. Not once only, but again and again, when one of the depressed classes has stood forward bravely before the zamindars and his fellow villagers, and pledged himself to be pure from the curse of



drink and drugs, some member of the audience, from the more educated classes, has come forward and embraced him.

I have seen this happening in Bolpur and it has been of great interest to me to read in the newspapers, how this very thing has been a feature of the new student movement, not only in Bengal, but in other parts of India also.

The concluding fact, which I would mention, has perhaps affected me personally most deeply of all. It happened at the end of one of these meetings in the villages, which the student workers in our neighbourhood had organised. I will try to relate it, just as I saw it enacted.

One old, decrepit and very poor peasant from the depressed classes, got up to speak. At first, he trembled with fear at the novel position in which he found himself. For he had never dared to speak out thus before. But the zamindars and pleaders present encouraged him. At last, with very deep emotion, he raised his folded hands in an attitude of prayer, and asked the zamindars present, in the name of the Motherland, *not to oppress the poor.*

I shall never in all my life forget that village moonlight scene,—how timidly the old villager began to stammer out what was burning in his heart, how the zamindars cheered him on to make a clean breast of all his inner thoughts,—and then, how the fire flashed in his eyes, and his voice became almost choked with suppressed feeling, as he told them about the injustice which the poor people had received at the hands of the zamindars, and the need of its removal.

This story has brought me to what, I believe, is the central remaining problem of Swaraj. The Hindu-Muslim Unity (as Mahatma Gandhi with the eye of genius saw clearly) was the first and foremost problem. That problem has been already solved in the main outline, though much yet remains to be done. Now, it appears to me, the treatment of the Depressed Classes,—the Untouchables, the oppressed poor of India,—is the second problem. Only through its solution, lies the direct pathway to Indian Freedom.

I seemed to witness this second problem being solved before my very eyes, on that

moonlight night, in that Bengal village, when the zamindars, who were present, rose in a body and said solemnly,—“We shall not oppress the poor. We promise it.” At that dramatic moment, I could see before me the vision of an India, truly free.

I have found out one key fact of Indian History. It was strangely hidden from me before; but now it has become plain and clear. I have discovered why India forfeited her freedom. It was not merely because of the great Hindu-Muslim conflict, which went on for so many centuries. That alone could not have brought about such total loss as India suffered. No! India lost her freedom, because of the oppression of those humbler and poorer members of society, whose duty it had been to offer service to the community. Instead of being honoured because of their humble work of service, they became despised. They were down-trodden by the wealthy and the higher castes, till in many instances they almost lost the form and dignity of man. This is why India forfeited her freedom.

I do not mean to imply for one moment that India has been alone among the nations to blame in this matter. Other nations also have suffered her fate of subjection owing to the same cause,—the oppression of the poor. The great Russian nation is a ruin to-day, on that same account. I have myself witnessed oppressions of the poor within the British Empire perpetrated by my own fellow countrymen, for which I know full well that we, Englishmen, shall have to render strict account. The Law of Karma works itself out in every single instance. There is no escape from its unswerving justice.

I had some experience before,—concerning the condition of the depressed classes, in Madras, and in the United Provinces, and in other parts of India. But what I have found out about the Begar system, of Forced Labour, and its age-long abuses, has opened my eyes still further. I have asked myself again and again the question, whether Independence is possible for India, until a beginning is made, at least, to get these inveterate and persistent evils righted. The answer has always been,—

"Swaraj is impossible, as long as these things still remain wholly unremedied."

We need, in India, an ideal of service of the poor; and this new Student Movement is giving to this ideal a concrete shape and form.

There is a very beautiful story about Mahatma Gandhi, which I am never tired of repeating. It was told me one day, with a laugh and a smile, by Mahatmaji himself. As he told it, the tears gathered in my eyes, because the truth of what he said came home in a touching manner to my heart.

Mahatmaji explained laughingly to me, that on a certain occasion, the Chairman, at one of his meetings, had tried to pay him the best compliment that he could, by saying, that, although Mahatma Gandhi was only a Vaishya by birth, yet, in this present incarnation, he had become a Kshattriya and a Brahmin by merit. Mahatmaji replied, that the Chairman had taken away from him the one honour, which he coveted most of all,—the merit of being a Sudra!

Until that dignity of service of the poor is rightly understood, which Mahatmaji thus

so perfectly expressed, there can be no true Swaraj. We have all read the stories of the Buddha, how he served the poor and gave his life for the poor. And Christ, my own Master, has said in greatly remembered words,—

“Which of the two is the greater, he that sitteth down at the feast, or he that serveth? But I am among you as a servant.”

It has often appeared to me, that the women of India have most truly learnt this dignity of service—this supreme Law, that “he who truly serves, truly rules.” That is why they so quickly understand Mahatma Gandhi. That is why they have poured their gold and jewels at his feet.

It remains for our students, in this new Student Movement to fulfil the same supreme law of service on behalf of the manhood of India. For, as Mahatmaji himself has told us, Swaraj itself is to be won, among the outcast and the poor and the oppressed,—among the poorest, the lowliest and the lost.

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